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conceptual packaging

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CONCEPTUAL PACKAGING

an experiment using materials and forms to package immaterial concepts

Thirada Raungpaka



Submitted to the faculty of the School of the Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Master of Fine Arts in Design/Visual
Communication.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	7
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Introduction	8
--------------	---

Problem Statement + Inspiration	10
------------------------------------	----

Retrospective Work	22
--------------------	----

Process+Methodology	32
---------------------	----

Applied Project	50
--------------------	----

Exhibition	88
------------	----

Evaluation	90
------------	----

Bibliography	92
--------------	----

Thank you	94
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Abstract

Packaging and package design is commonly thought of as a tool to attract the consumer to material goods. Packages, however, have other attributes. In Japan, packaging design is very charming because of the delicate selection of materials, images, and interaction. Different kinds of material provide different emotions and appeal to our sense of touch, which can be interpreted in many ways.

Packaging lets us directly interact with an object and this experience becomes memorable and intimate. The combination of image and interaction creates another dimension of story telling. My creative project, *Conceptual Packaging*, is an experiment in using materials and forms to package immaterial concepts and messages such as memories.

Introduction

My father worked for Thai international Airline in my childhood, so he traveled to many different countries for his work. Every time he came back home, he brought back candy for me. I was always excited and jumped around like a kid. But there was one time when he came back from Japan. He handed me a beautiful wood box painted with soft pink “Sakura” flowers (“Sakura” is Cherry Blossom in Japanese). That time, I didn’t jump around as usual. I slowly took it from his hand. I felt a little bit nervous to open it. I didn’t want to destroy this precious box. It was just a box of candy, but I felt like it was my treasure. I remember walking around with it everywhere. I didn’t even eat the candy or let anybody else eat it. That was the first time that I fell in love with package design.

As an adult, I’ve had chances to go to Japan because of my parents’ business. I continued to be inspired by the many wonderful packages. I am more fascinated than ever with how packaging can stimulate emotions in different ways. Traditional Japanese desserts are often represented either with the season with which they are associated or with a reference to where they originated. Frequently, you will see a dessert shaped like a flower, leaf or fruit. So, the package has to tell that story. The thing that makes Japanese packaging different from those of other countries is the detail. Materials, forms, colors, interactivity and narrative are used thoughtfully. These details communicate memorable messages and make an emotional connection between me and the package. As a result, every time I go to Japan, I always come back with a luggage full of packaging.

This passion is reflected in my interest in communication design. I have often used the form of the package and 3-D object to communicate my messages in class projects. These experiences make me realize that packaging can contain conceptual and intangible messages, not just representation of food and products. Moreover, it has much potential to communicate different levels of messages effectively. It has many elements for people to interpret such as materials, texture, images, interactivity, smell and form.

Within my creative project, I explore different aspects of theory and experimentation such as the communicative potentials of materials, the narrative of interactive package design and the various ways in which different types of messages can be communicated effectively, namely through materials, interactivity, imagery and shape. I hope my study creates innovative approaches and creative methods for communication.



Problem Statement + Inspiration

The purpose of my creative project is to create innovative visual languages by using the form of packaging design to convey conceptual ideas and intangible messages. I intend to create different visual narratives through packaging design to communicate concepts related to memory clearly and expressively. I will examine how to bring out the unique qualities of each packaging design element (material, shape, interactivity and imagery), and how to make them work together cohesively. I will determine the best construction for each package. *Can ideas and concepts be packaged? Can packaging design communicate conceptual idea effectively, if so, how?*

From the time I was a little girl with only one painted Sakura box, to ten years later, awaking in a room half-filled with hundreds of packaging examples to now, as a graduate student in America, it is clear that the charm of packaging has had a strong effect on what excites me as an artist and designer.



Japanese package design provides perfect examples of the thoughtful combination of 3D form, selective materials and the incorporation of visual images to create objects that are very sensual and desirable. Most Japanese products have good packaging design; in the Japanese culture a product's presentation is one way to show respect to the customer. This idea has been developed from ancient beliefs. If we look at traditional Japanese packaging, we will see how natural products such as fish, eggs, fruits and vegetables were packaged with beautiful materials inspired by folk arts. Richard S. Thornton addressed this aspect of Japanese culture in a 1993 Print Magazine article entitled "The Freewheeling of Japanese Packaging." He explained how Japanese culture has the belief that every object contains a spirit inside.



It is this idea of "a spirit inside" that interests me. Packaging the non-material: the ephemeral.



Packaging gives me the opportunity to experience the feel of a 3D object—it gives me something that I can hold, touch, and interact with. I picture all the packages that I have in my room. I put them on the shelf as decorative objects. Packaging, for me, is no different than any other precious object. It is not something that is disposable, but something to be considered and enjoyed. Possibly, this is the reason why packaging affects human emotions and desires so deeply: by nature we, as humans, love objects and feel an intimate relationship to things. Pablo Neruda, Nobel Prize winner in literature, wrote a series of poems called *Odes to Common Things* in which he described how he was inspired by objects around him.

*Many things conspired
to tell me the whole story.
Not only did they touch me,
or my hand touched them:
they were
so close
that they were a part
of my being.
They were so alive with me
that they lived half my life
and will die half my dead.*

Pablo Neruda

His poem reflects how we are infatuated with objects around us. Akiko Busch also discusses the relationships between humans and their objects in her book *The Uncommon Life of Common Objects*. She describes how we value objects as something that can tell us a story, and how these objects can tell a story more eloquently than people. Objects give an instantaneous picture of a story. There are many times that I look at a package and pictures fly through my head.

Because 3D objects have a capability to attract humans and tell stories meaningfully, many designers and artists use the concept of packaging within their work. Mitsuru Katsumoto, a Japanese artist, combines 3D form, print media and different kinds of materials to create book covers, which she believes will give a stronger sense of story and a complex flavor.

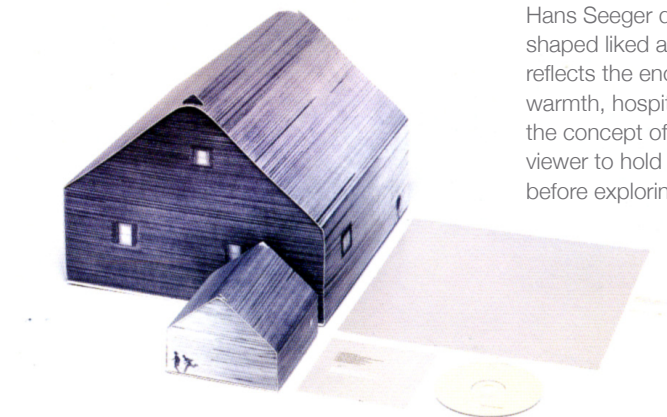


Before starting my experiments, it is important to clearly define what I mean by packaging design. Most people would think of it as the creation of an array of containers designed to protect products and attract people's attention. For me, packaging is something that communicates the relationship of two things—outside and inside. Books, for example, can be thought of as packaging for stories. Our body can be viewed as a package for our soul. In my creative project, I am attempting to explore another aspect of packaging design, which I call **“conceptual packaging.”** Conceptual packaging is the combination of both the general form of packaging (3D form, text and images) with an emphasis on playfulness, and expression.

The intention of conventional packaging is mostly based on marketing. In the book “It is a Matter of Packaging, The author describes how designers have to consider graphics, construction, materials used, production, durability, legibility, and safety issues when designing packaging. The environmental impact of packaging design can also be an issue. Daniel Mason points out in the book *Experimental Packaging*: how contemporary packaging has to be recognizable (attract consumers), informative (provide information about the product), immediate (provoke an immediate response), textural (use appropriate materials), functional (be convenient to use), and dependable (can be standardized for production). Some of these factors are the reason why mass production of packaging limits a designer's creativity and innovation.

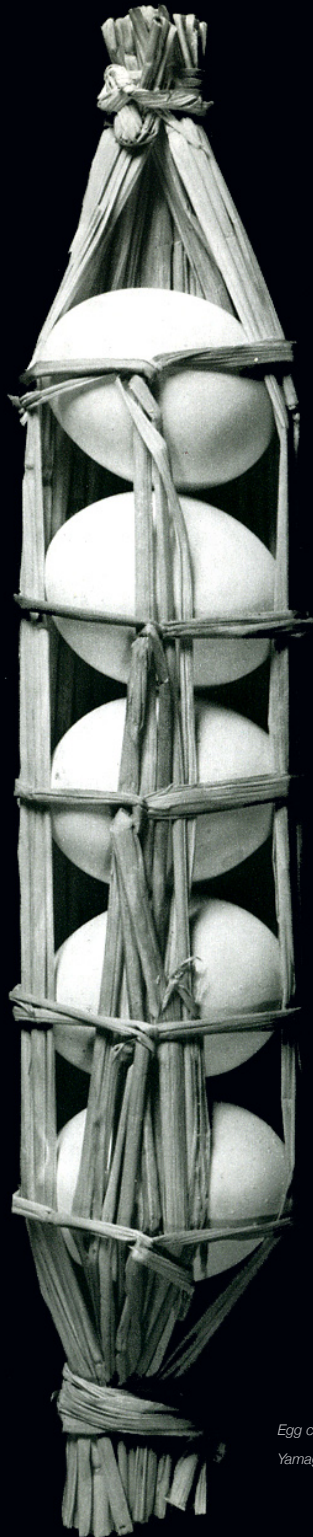
Conceptual packaging doesn't have to concern itself with the same kind of limits. Conceptual packaging can communicate a concept expressively, clearly and memorably. It must be able to tell a story instantaneously and also allow the viewer experience a narrative by interacting with it. In order to explore these abilities, I am defining the elements of conceptual packaging to specifically include: shape, materials, interactivity, and visual image.

Shape: Since all of packaging is in 3D form, shape beyond the expected can be an exciting tool. Japanese alcoholic beverages are contained in bottles that are the same shape as ancient traditional bottles but which instead use modern materials such as plastic to create a remarkable contrast. Many fragrance products also use shapes to convey a concept or theme. The products of Anna Sui often apply this technique to the packaging of perfume. For instance, *the Dolly Girl* perfume series was designed in the shape of doll face to express the theme of the product. I see this as an advantage of packaging design that can be adapted into conceptual packaging.



Hans Seeger designed a CD package shaped like a house. The packaging reflects the enclosed recording's traits of warmth, hospitality and humanity through the concept of home. Shape can invite the viewer to hold and explore the object itself before exploring the interior.





Egg carrier devise by farmers in Yamagata

Materials: In addition to shape, materials can also provide meaning. Hideyuki Oka mentions in his book, *How to Wrap Five More Eggs*, that materials unconsciously enhance meaning and feeling to the viewer. He presents an example of straw holders for eggs. The farmer uses a few wisps of rice straws, a material that is natural and flexible to wrap his eggs. His packaging gives the sentiment of freshness and warmth of a newly laid egg. The rice straw reminds us of a picture of hens hatching their eggs on the hay. Some materials also bring back memories from our subconscious.



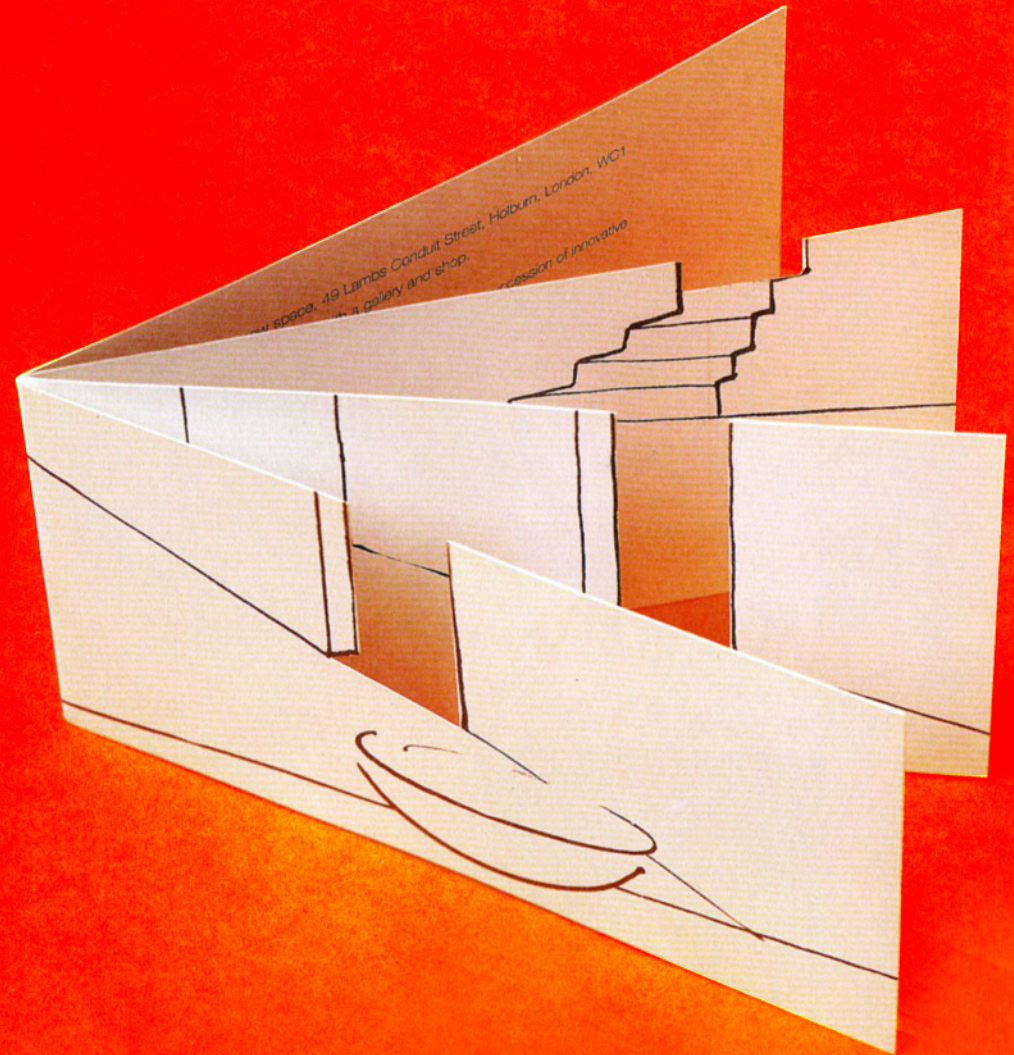
Just by looking at materials, we are able to feel a sense of how something might feel to the touch and begin to interpret its meaning. Kenya Hara, a Japanese Graphic designer, produced an exhibition called "Haptic." The term "Haptic" means to be palpable to the sense of touch. The Haptic exhibition focused on design and tactile perception. Twenty one professional designers were involved in this exhibition. Their design pieces used different kinds of materials that created different moods and meaning. For example, a set of Geta, Japanese sandals, were made with a texture that looks like the ground, which express the messages of earth and humankind's relation to it. The viewer gets the feeling of nature and is able to interpret the message the designer wants to convey.

The textures of materials are key to providing diverse reactions. However, the density of materials and their translucence also can create a distinctive feeling. Many perfume bottles use translucent materials to create comfortable feelings. Moreover, some materials can create a sense of dimension and reflection. Yoshie Watanabe, Japanese designer, is popular for her unique design of gift boxes, postcards, and greeting cards. One of her designs is a set of mirror boxes and mirror cards. She used the effect of reflective materials with the images, which create interesting dimension in her box.

Interactivity: Interactivity for packaging is the function that allows the viewer to be involved in the design of the piece especially by holding and touching it. Interactivity creates movement and adds playfulness to packaging. More importantly, it can convey and emphasize the meaning of messages embedded in the packaging material. Ryosuke Uehara is one designer that uses interactivity to communicate his message. His greeting card design comes in a small package. The inside is filled with little jigsaw pieces. The viewer has to work out the puzzle to read the message. The message is "Bringing you a piece of happiness."



Interactivity can furthermore lead the viewer to experience the design sequentially. A change-of-address card designed by Allies works like a flipbook, which creates sense in the viewer of moving step by step through three-dimensional space.





Imagery: The last, but very important element is imagery. The style of Imagery is the key to set mood and tone of a package. Shiseido packaging evokes the concept of ancient beauty and is influenced by art deco. Moreover, appropriate choice of imagery: digital illustration, photography, hand drawn pictures, can help convey messages expressively. Damian Wilson's Disciple CD packaging communicates concept of *Grow old with me* by using childlike hand draw imagery.



Retrospective work

Studying in the graduate program in VCU has increased my independence. The faculty encouraged experimentation, allowing students to use all types of media. There was never a “right” or “wrong” approach to a particular project. I felt free to incorporate my passion for packaging design in my work and often used three-dimensional forms.



Pop-up book: Gay Marriage

My first project was in the fall of 2004, with Professor Susan Roth. The assignment was to make a visual commentary on a political issue related to the 2004 Presidential elections. Personally, politics is something I consider to be too serious and rather uninteresting. Professor Roth suggested that I choose an issue that I felt personally attached to. So, I decided to choose the issue of Gay Marriage. I came to this country from Bangkok, where people are open with homosexuality and transsexuality. I also have good relationships with several gay friends, which made me more enthusiastic about this project.



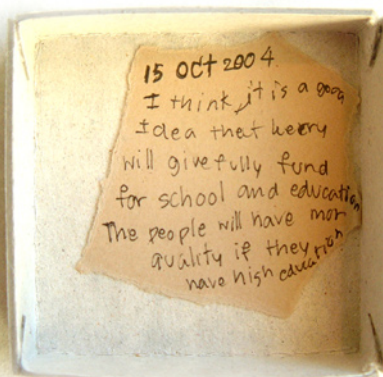
I considered this political issue to be serious so I decided to use playful media to communicate my idea. When I was a child I loved 3D pop-up books. I wished that my boring textbooks could be pop-up books. So, I created a 3D pop-up book to demonstrate a gay marriage debate. I was surprised how well others interacted and enjoyed the pop-up book. This project allowed me to gain insight into the use of 3D form to communicate serious subjects playfully.

2004 Presidential Election Documentation

Another political project in the fall 2004 semester was the documentation of the 2004 Presidential Election in Professor Rob Carter's class. This project was even more difficult since I had to address many political issues from my personal point of view. I was unsure of how to organize and document so much available information.



My initial attempt was organizing my documentation into digital files. However, I could not see my documentation as a whole. Instead I made 60 boxes that represented the 60 days of documentation and arranged miniature objects depicting different political issues inside of each box.



This method gave me a clear system and allowed me to see all the political issues as one big picture. The miniature objects were made out of newspaper to remind people of the election as a timely event. I also attached images on each side of the boxes to further communicate my messages.



I displayed my boxes as pieces of a puzzle, so when it was put together, it became a picture of the new president. I went from feeling confused about this project to actually enjoying it and I realized how much I really love making boxes and small objects. Moreover, I saw the potential of using 3D objects to organize and display complicated messages in a clear way. This method of visual communication allowed the viewer to explore and personally interact with my works as well.

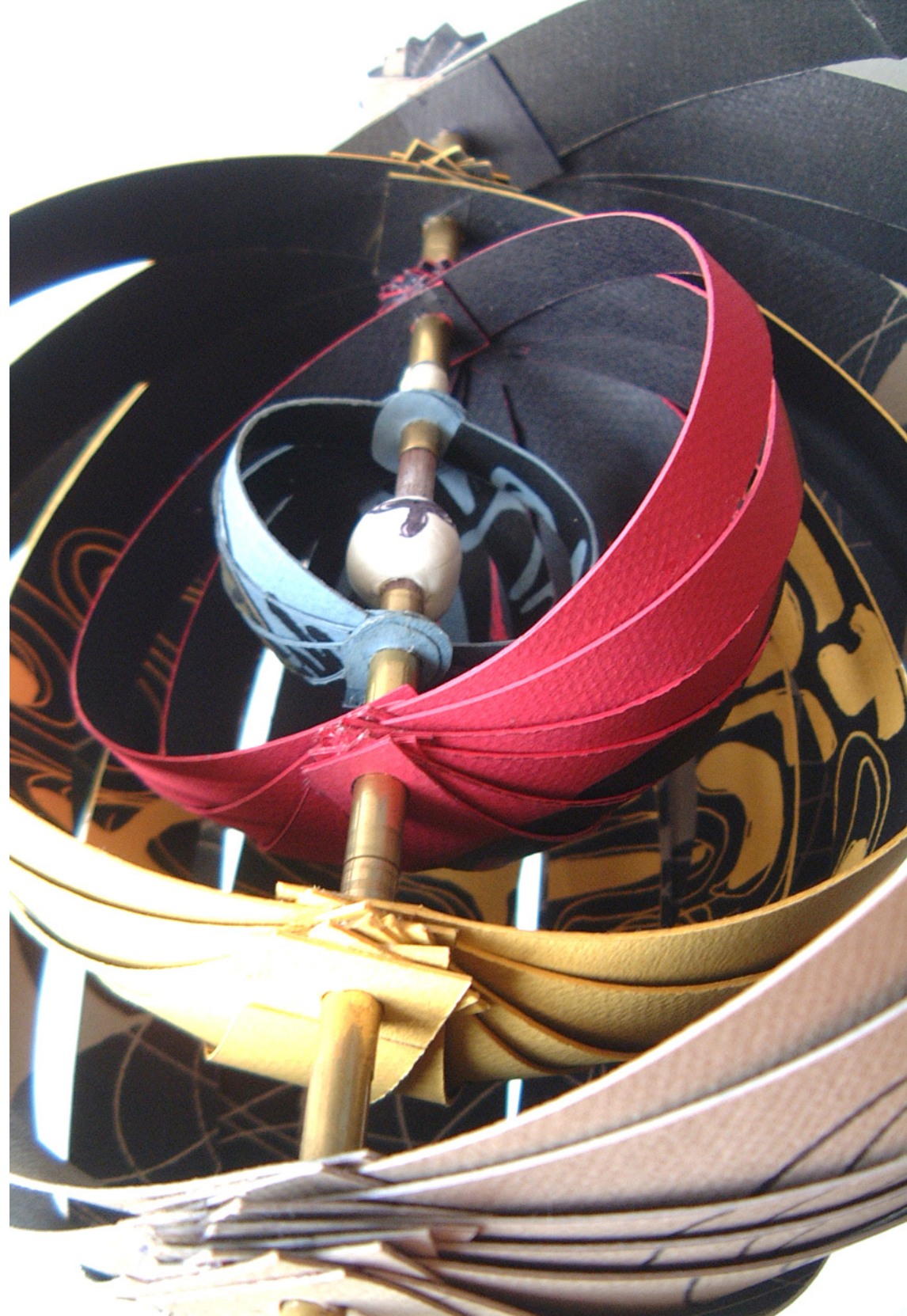


Sandberg's World

In Professor Henk Groenendijk's class in the spring 2005, I had the opportunity to create more 3D works. Henk introduced us to several works of Willem Sandberg, a famous Dutch designer, and asked us to create our own work to represent one of his pieces. I was given a typography book called *Typographica 11* to work with. This book has complicated content describing the system of life and living. Sandberg described life as a progressive of objects and space. For example, inside the world is the city, inside the city is a house and so on.



My final solution was to create 3D objects that allowed the audience to view my piece from one large object to one small object, symbolizing the same concept of the Sandberg book, but easier to understand. This was another time that I use 3D techniques to explain complicated subject matter.





Green project

In the first year of my graduate study, I had experience using 3D forms to communicate both serious information and complicated content, but I never experimented with personal subjects. In Sandy Wheeler's workshop in fall 2006, I had a chance to experiment with personal expression, which is more conceptual. Sandy asked us to communicate a personal meaning of the word "green." In Thai culture, there was one shade of green that was often used to represent evil, ghosts and bad spirits. Many Thai horror films apply green light when a ghost appears. Because of this green represented to me the idea of grudge and anger. I began to experiment this concept (my anger) by using 3D objects.



I created a series of voodoo dolls and encased them in resin, giving the appearance of a frozen block. The dolls were positioned in different ways to portray different means of torture. This project allowed me to experiment with new materials and new ways of creating specific effects, giving my work more meaning.



Process+Methodology

What is going to be in my box?

“Trying to put different things in a box to see how they fit” is probably a perfect way to describe my early process.

Even though I had already chosen conceptual packaging as a topic of my creative project, I had no idea what content (subject matter) my packages should contain. With so many possibilities, I was confused and hesitant at the beginning.

I decided to use the whole semester of fall 2005 to seek the content for my conceptual packaging. I began experimenting and making things that combine different types of content and concepts.

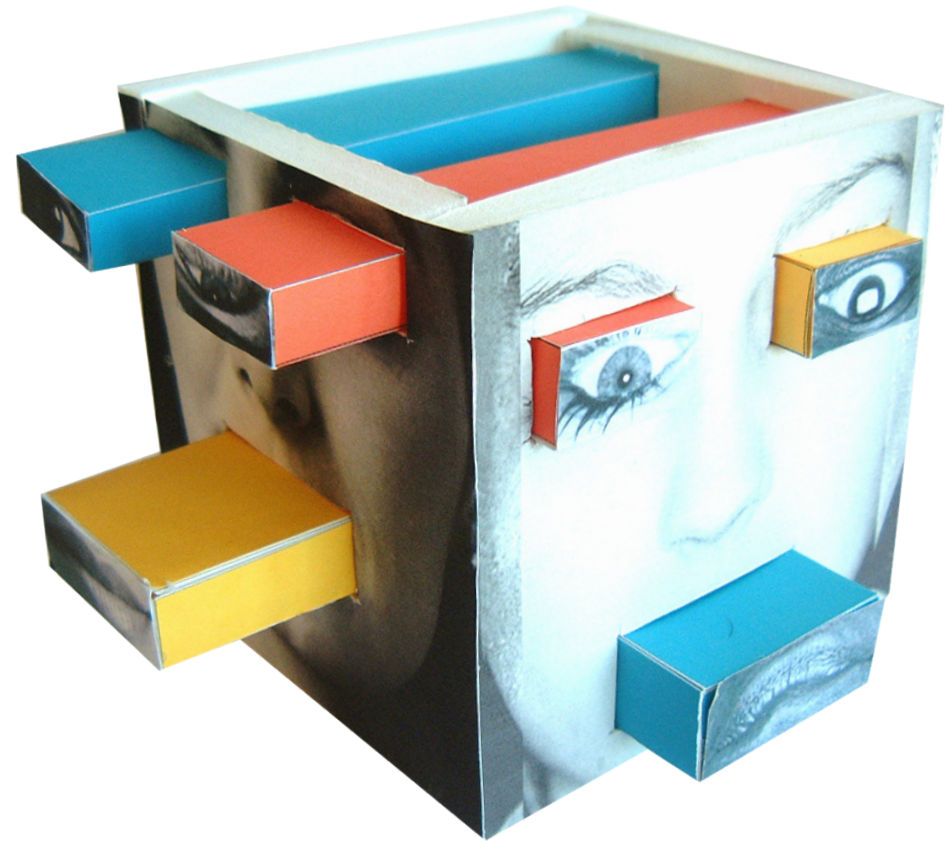


Playing

My first approach was what I would call playing. Because I really had no clue what content would best fit my conceptual packaging concept, I let myself play and make things without being too conscious. I expected this method would allow me to discover a subject matter that I was interested in.

I created a number of 3D objects based on ideas flowing in my mind such as imagination, emotion, intangible expression and child education.

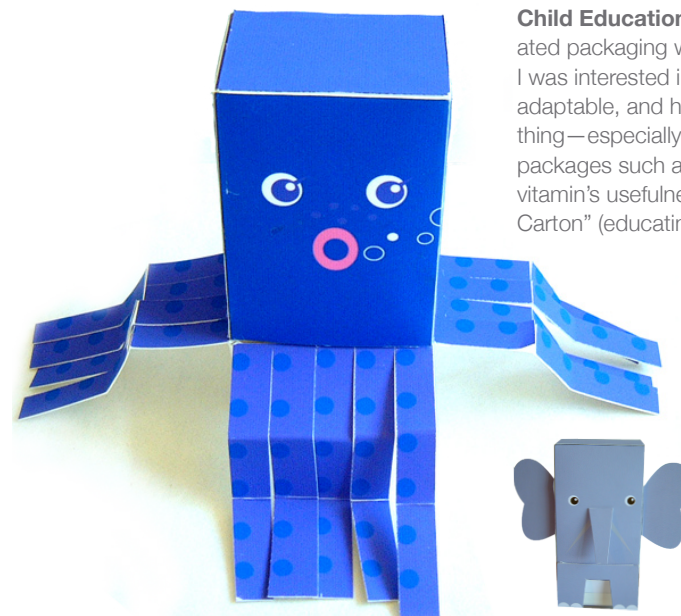
Imagination: When I was a kid, I always dreamt of traveling in an imaginary world. Sometimes, I played with drawers imagining that each held different places where I wanted to travel. I created 2 boxes inspired by that dream. The first box was "Clover Land". Another was "Japanese Paper Festival."



Emotion: I experimented using 3D objects to communicate human emotion. I made an "emotional box" that had different faces on each side. Eyes and mouths were removable and could change like human emotions.



Intangible Expression: After two sets of experiments, I decided to try some content that was more abstract. I picked “love” and “freedom” as keywords. So, I created packages to contain love and freedom. I found it too broad and the results were not very clear.



Child Education: In this experiment, I created packaging with more concrete content. I was interested in packaging that is playful, adaptable, and had potential to teach something—especially to children. I did a series of packages such as “Vitamin Box” (teaching vitamin’s usefulness) and “Reversible Milk Carton” (educating about animals).

After spending time making boxes and 3D objects until late Fall 2005, I stopped and looked at the works I had done to see which had the most potential for further development. Among all of the box, I was most interested in the packaging of the imaginary world. A week before the end of semester, I produced two more in the series of imaginary boxes: The result was a "Tree Forest" box and a "Mushroom House" box. At this time, I experimented with alternative ways to open the boxes, producing a different interactive experience from the first series

However, at this time, I still felt unclear about this direction because imagination as a creative project focus seemed too abstract and broad.



Seeking and Narrowing

In Spring 2006, I returned to school with great anxiety. It was the last semester and I had expected I would be clear about my content and direction by this time. Seeing that other classmates had their content and direction established my tension.

I decided to put making packaging and objects on hold. I focused more seriously on seeking and narrowing my subject matter. Free writing about imagination every day was a method that I chose to narrow down my thoughts. I ended up writing quite a few poetic-like stories.

Similar to the boxes I had created, my stories reflected my imagination. Some stories were about family and good memories from the past. Some stories were about fantasy and the subconscious world. However, since time was passing quickly, I was rushing myself to pick one direction despite feeling indecisive. Consequently, I felt overwhelmed and confused with my unorganized ideas.

Sidetrack

Sometimes, when we try to find something, but can't, it is tempting to give up and look for other things.

Even though I had experiences of struggling with past projects before, the time I spent battling the creative project was blocking my mind. I lost track of things and lost track of the main goals of the work. In response, I completely discarded packaging as my focus and turned to theoretical research about the imagination. I took a few weeks to read a few books about theories of imagination and the subconscious: *Active Imagination* by Carl Jung and *A trip into your unconscious mind* by W.A. Mambert and B. Frank Foster. I drastically changed the goal of my creative from exploration of conceptual packaging to communicating the world of subconscious. I then decided to create a digital movie about the human subconscious.

I sketched a storyboard based on a concept of "a wind-up doll," based on idea that everything we do is controlled by our subconscious. According to my research, I divided the world of the subconscious into five different worlds: shadow (world of self-denial), memory (world of past remembrance), fear (world of fright), creativity (world of imagination), and fantasy (world of day dreaming).

I created a story of the wind-up doll walking through those five different worlds to communicate my interpretation of the subconscious. I then started making the movie. My choice of style for the movie illustration was photo collage. I took pictures of a wind-up doll and of many other objects. I put them together to create an initial scenario for the movie. While working on this project, I didn't have as much fun as when I was making packaging, but I continued to make as much progress as possible because it was close to thesis review.

I finished one part of the scene and presented it in the thesis review. I got different reactions from the professors: One concern was that there was no perceived narrative. Many questioned this huge change of direction. Professor John Malinoski asked me "Do you feel right?" about this direction. That question woke me up. I realized that I didn't have enthusiasm for making the movie. With encouragement from professors and peers, I decided to go back to conceptual packaging.

Break through

When I returned to my original idea, I realized the old problems still remained. I still needed content for my packaging. Finally, I discovered the core problem that I had been struggling with: I was confused about the different between content and topic.

Having a conversation with Professor Roy McKelvey helped me to understand this difference. In my case, exploring the possibilities of conceptual packaging was my topic. I just needed content to provide the basis for experimentation. This realization enable me to stick with my topic, but that varying the content would allow me to experiment with conceptual packaging in varied ways.

Back on track

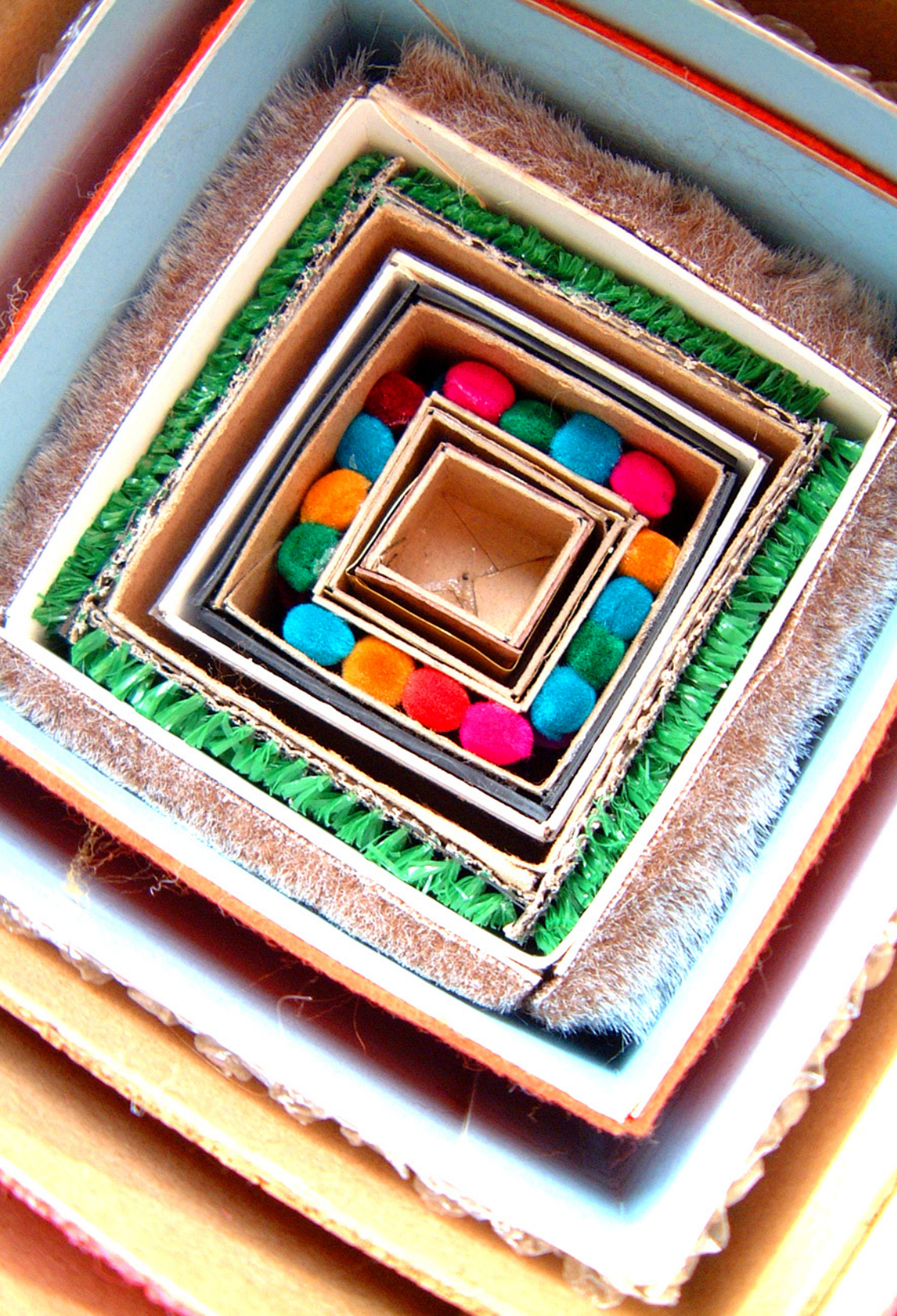
I once again started to experiment with conceptual packaging. This time, however, I had a clearer mind and had a specific purpose.

To create successful conceptual packaging, it was important to explore and study the basic elements of packaging. Materials that provide various tactile experiences allowed packaging to convey emotions, to provide meaning and tell stories expressively. I was inspired by the choice of materials of works from many Japanese designers such as Kenya Hara and Yoshie Watanabe.



I decided to start a texture exploration. I grabbed my digital camera and walked around campus. I took a series of photographs of textures and created a texture book. I observed that each texture spoke with a different voice. The texture of glass had softness and evoked a soothing feeling. It could be used, for example, to communicate purity. The texture of grass on the other hand communicates a fresh feeling and suggests different stories such as playing fetch with a dog, or lying down and reading a book.





After my studied with pictures, I was keen to experiment with real materials. I started collecting materials from recycling bins and other sources. I then made a series of boxes from large to small in size. I tied them into a serpentine form. This construction allowed me to see the differentiation of each material. It was interesting to see objects in the same shape conveying distinctive feelings, because of materials.



Applied Project: Memory Cradle

“Somehow, getting lost helped me find something.”

I chose “ memories ” as a subject matter to explore. I got this idea from my studies of the subconscious world. The idea of memory was ambiguous and sentimental. It could be interpreted many different ways, and would offer me the opportunity to experiment with the idea of conceptual packaging.

I always wanted to create conceptual packaging that held something valuable and meaningful. For me, perfumes, jewelry, brand name purses and etc. were worthless. Memories, on the other hand, were beautiful, precious and substantial. In my opinion great memories bring happiness, relieve homesickness and provide hope.

I therefore aimed to create conceptual packaging that contained wonderful memories. I was determined to communicate my very positive personal memories that others could relate to. I wanted to convey my memories meaningfully, clearly and effectively. I wanted my audiences to recognize the essential charm of memories.

I created a series of three memory packages: “Living (with) Things,” “Pong-Pang” and “Soaking Memory.”

My process and methodology in making these series involved incorporating a conceptual idea (a story and interpretation) with traditional packaging design elements (shape, materials, interactivity, and visual imagery).





Project 1: “Living (with) Things”

Many simple things became a part of my memories and have become part of me.

At the time, I was inspired by the book *Odes to Common Things* by Pablo Neruda, and *The Uncommon Life of Common Objects* written by Akiko Busch. These addressed the connection between human life and things that surround them. They discuss, for example, why we love our things and why we attach certain emotions to the certain objects. Many simple objects around me became part of my life. They became evidence of my memories.

I decided to use this idea and refine its meaning visually. I made a list of simple things that became a part of my being and memories: things like a big tree in front of my house, and an old stuffed animal. My list included such specific things as a working desk, a bridge, a swing, a toy rocking giraffe, and a wooden boat

I selected 10 items and I created visual narrative of my memories that were connected to each of them.

I then began to develop a packaging design system. I chose a basic square box as a form for my packaging and focused on the choice of materials.

Because the stories expressed things that I grew up with, it was important to use materials that made the box look aged. I believed this added more character to the stories.



I experimented with different methods to create an old-looking box. Because I had a difficult time finding old materials, I decided to create an aged effect on my own. I made 10 different sized boxes from cardboard. I then covered them with stained paper.

I started by trying to dye cream colored paper with various liquids such as tea, coffee and soy sauce. These techniques were not really efficient because they left a strong smell and gave inconsistent results. I tried to remove the smell and had little success. My final solution was to scan the stain on rice paper and print them out. After I covered the box with this paper, I rubbed it with my hand to produce a distinctive tactile quality.



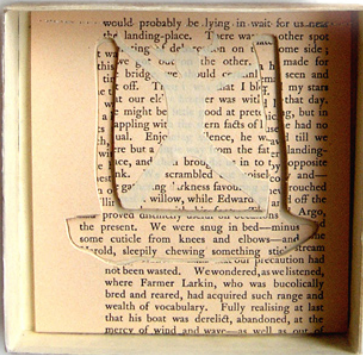


I then explored what the boxes would hold: personal memories about meaningful things. I developed miniature model of things in my memory to put inside the boxes. To accentuate the sweetness of my memories, these miniatures were designed to convey endearing feelings to the audience. I selected soft felts and collected natural materials to create the models.



I developed the models without sketching. Making and building became my way of sketching. There was no doubt that my early boxes looked odd. I had problems trying to carve balsa wood into the shape of toy rocking-giraffe. The desk model looked unsteady. But, learning by my mistakes helped me get better after making two or three models. After I finished all of the ten models, I arranged each inside a separate box depicting, scenes from my past.





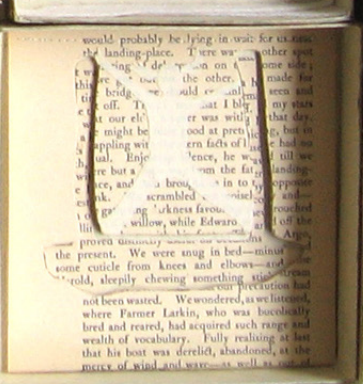
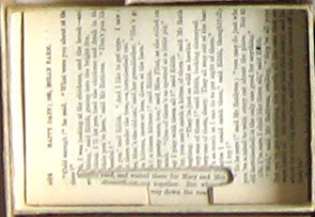
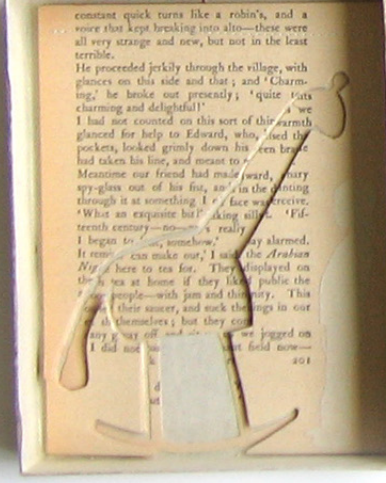
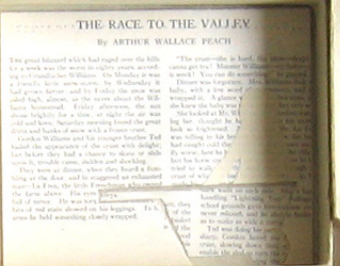
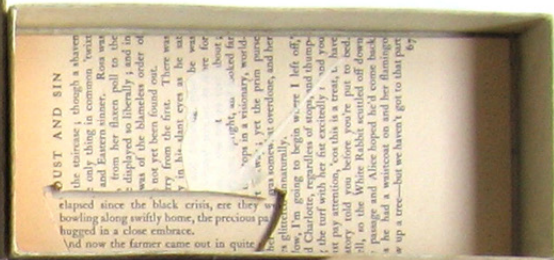
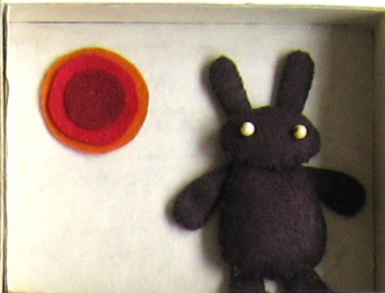
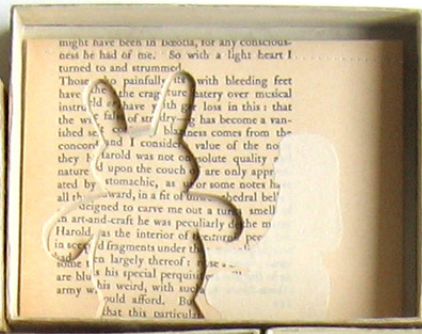
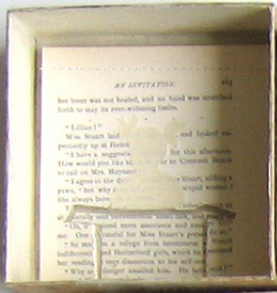
Finally, I considered what would be an interesting way to communicate the stories of my relationship with each boxed object. I came up with the idea of placing an old book on the topside of each box. I cut a silhouette shape of each object through the book pages. When viewers flipped through each page, they would see the narrative of my memories with each object, positive and negative, side by side.

could see now. "I reckon she'd wish she hadn't shook me." No, they're just for show, that's all—only just for show."

"I judge you've got it about right, Sandy," says I.

"Why, look at it yourself," says he. "You ain't built for wings—no man is. You know what a grist of years it took you to come here from the earth—and yet you were booming along faster than any cannon-ball could make. Suppose you had to fly that distance with out starvings. It was't eternity have been over as killed, pl go ttle thin. Certainly. Well, angels have by and the d said, very fine, millions of them—to be blessed words. I fly her children and good people, you knw we like it. But she did business. They appear with ed. S dled my no because they are on, ssed to me, called me the dying persons when is her v—but she car, gels if they hadn't w all the time. The oth they fly with them? It stands I didron they it, and. The wings would wear out before they got less nway; even the pinfeathers would be gone; t caning frames would be as bare as kite s's befo nari'e paper is pasted on. The distances in ar any tions of times greater; angels have to go a r the da every day; could they do it with their sral sa/ No, indeed; they wear the wings for v tude, w travel distance in an instant b n she made believe that Night, and put up her bugle and blew the 'assembly'; and then, 'boots and saddles'; then the 'trot'; 'gallop'; 'charge!' Then she blew the 'retreat,' and said, 'That's for you, you rebels; the Rangers don't ever retreat!'

"The music frightened them away, but they were





Project 2: “Pong-Pang”

“Pong-Pang Pong-Pang,” This sound might not be special to everyone, but it connected me to many wonderful memories.

Pong-Pang is a double-faced drum with a long handle and attached beaters on strings (we called it *Pong-Pang* in Thailand because of the way it sounds). The Pong-Pang was my favorite toy during my childhood; I always would carry it with me when I played outside. The *Pong-Pang* kindles many memories. Every time I see *Pong-Pang* or hear its sound, pictures of my special childhood memories fly to my mind.

I related the idea of the Pong-Pang to four specific childhood memories.

Pong-Pang reminded me of a windy day I went out to fly a kite with my family.

Pong-Pang brought back the sound of water when I was walking alongside the creek catching little fish.

Pong-Pang reminded me of a clear dark sky filled with colorful fireworks.

Pong-Pang flashed back pictures of myself releasing floating flower boats into the river.

My goal was to depict these four memories through the use of conceptual packaging in a unique way.

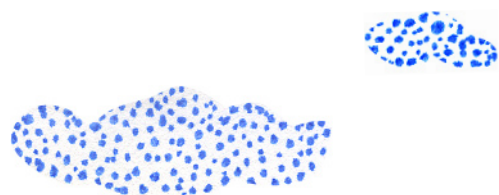
In this series, I wanted to experiment using shape as a primary expressive element of packaging. I immediately thought to make packaging in the shape of actual round drums. I was excited with this idea because the main structure of “Pong-Pang” was a hollow circle, which was perfect for adapting it to a box.



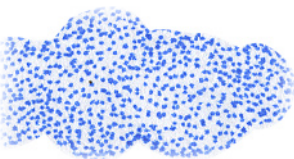
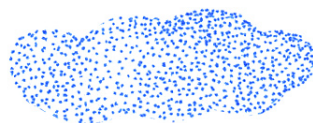
I associated the packaging with the “Pong-Pang” drum, but the circle part functioned as a unique container. When open, the scenario of my memories could pop-out from the box.

I started making “Pong-Pang” packaging by attaching a 3.5” round box with a long wooden stick. I molded white clay in a ball shape and attached it to a braided rope to make the beater.





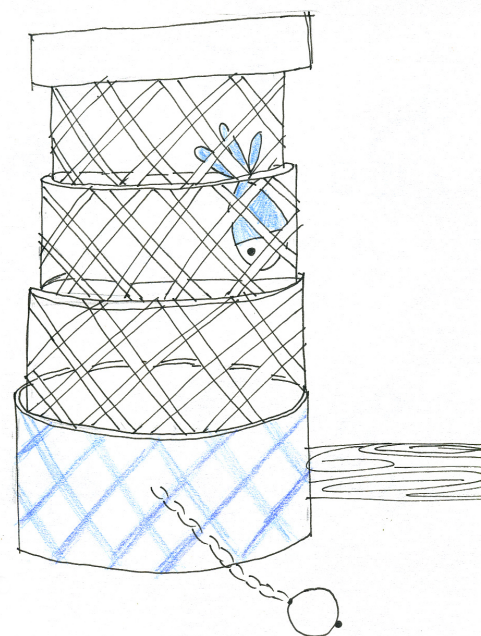
After I found the form, my next consideration was how the visual imagery would work outside and inside the package. Memory is vague and fuzzy. The visual image needed to express that feeling. In the past, I always applied photographs to create visual images. I wanted to explore something different, so I decided to use drawing to illustrate my ideas. I also felt that drawing, being such an accessible and common medium, would have more potential to transmit the sense of childhood.



I began sketching images and scenes that symbolized childhood memories, such as a little girl lying on the grass. I played with different drawings. Unintentionally, I found a way of drawing that perfectly conveyed the ambiguous feeling of memory. I drew everything with dots. This technique made the illustration look intriguing and hazy. I intended to hold back detail in my drawing, so that the viewers could connect their own memory to them.

I created a different visual illustration based on each of the four memories I had chosen for this series. I selected a variety of papers for printing, so that each packages articulated a unique sentiment. Once I finished the external design of each, I needed to consider how to make each scene pop-out properly, how to build interactivity into the structure of the packaging and how to create a different surprise in each box.

At the time, I sought out ideas about paper engineering and paper sculpture. I adapted many techniques such as flipping, pulling and popping up to my paper structures. I used techniques that fit to the stories and shapes of packaging. For example, in one box a kite flies up when the viewer pulls open the box. Step by step, I accomplished four distinct interactions in each drum package.













To assemble the four different packages, I created a toy wood box to display them together. This gave me a chance to learn how to use a scroll saw. I enjoyed experimenting with a wide range of tool, from scissors to power tools.





Project 3: “Soaking Memory”

The final packaging project “Soaking Memory” is the portrayal of my reminiscences of a rainy day.

My concept was inspired by the way I experience this memory. Soft sunlight, wind flowing, leaves flying slowly appear consecutively in my mind and merge together into one whole vision.

Carrying on with this concept, I wrote a poem about my rainy day memory.

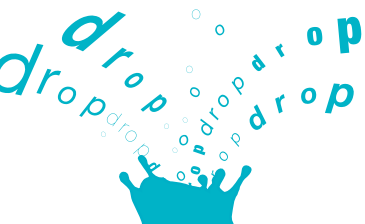
*The sun was tired
Hot wind was flowing
Leaves ran in circles
Dark clouds covered the sky
People were running around collecting drying clothes
Rain dripped
Frog were croaking
The sky cleared
The last rain drop fell*

I decided to use this poem and aimed to use packaging to communicate the poem sequentially.

Before I started this final packaging project, I had decided that I was going to involve typography to further my goal of having different explorations of conceptual packaging.

As always, I began my design with considerations of the form of the packaging. From my experience making the previous two projects, I noticed that it was easier to design the form of the package first and to adapt the visual graphics to it afterward. What I needed to consider about the form for this project was how to create a structure that would allow the audience to experience my poem sequentially and I also had to consider how to construct a space that would let graphics and type work together.

I started with a multiple-layer box. Each layer had different hand cut illustrations visualizing a sentence of my poem. For the interactive function, each sub-box held a card with lines of text from the poem. To view this package, the viewer has to pull out the cards one by one. Every time a new card is revealed, the viewer experiences different cutouts along with text. When the last card is revealed, all the cutouts form a whole picture of my memory, with image and text.



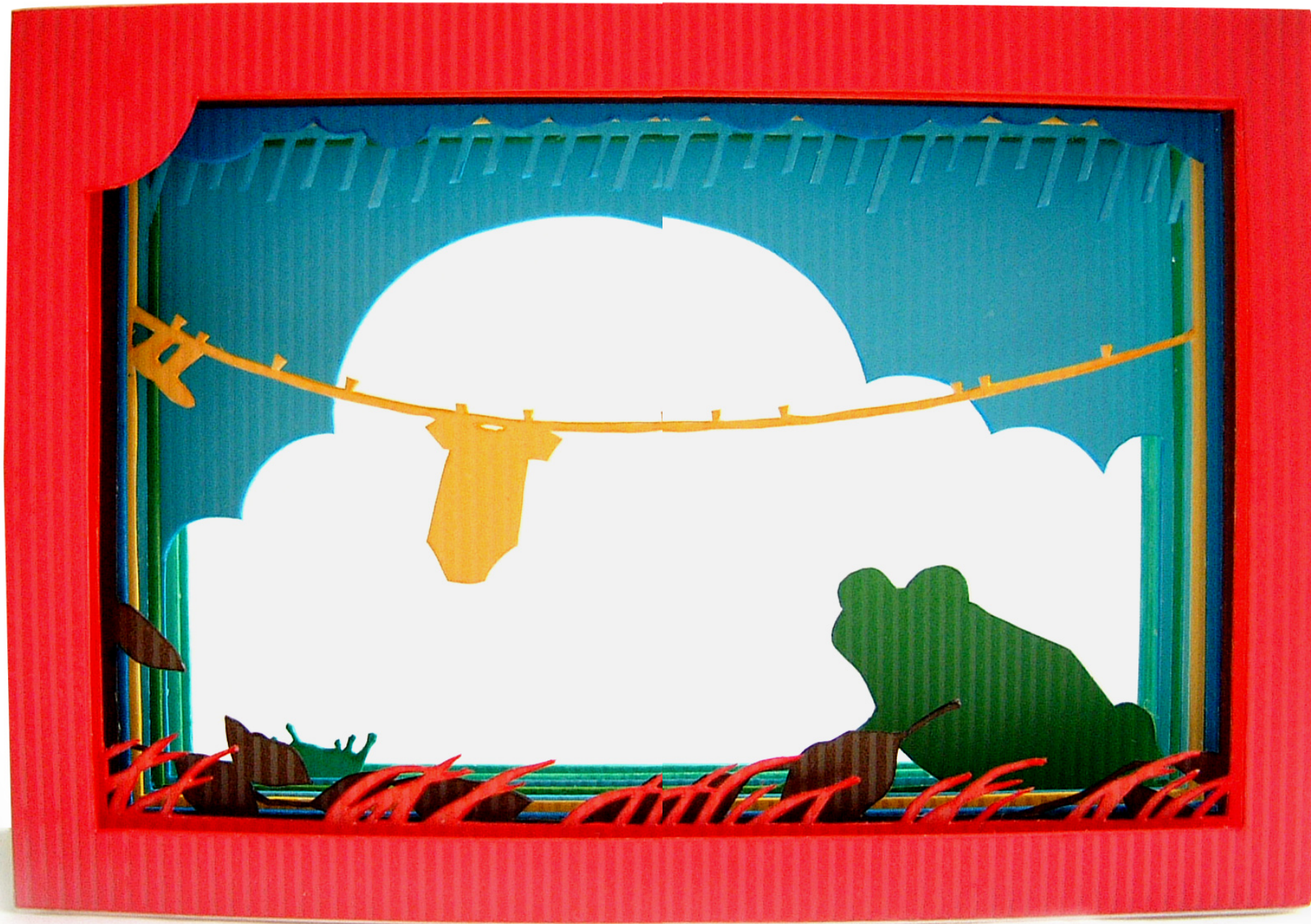
The main structure of this package was simple, but had a lot of cutouts. As a result, during the production, I struggled to find the method to make those cutouts look neat and clean. When I cut the cutouts, the edges peeled out and showed original color of the paper, which didn't match to the color of my illustration. It made the cutouts look inept. Using marker to paint the edges was a good resolution for covering the original paper. However, the papers soaked up the color ink from marker. So, I had to find the paper that didn't soak up the color. I many experimented with different kinds of paper, but I didn't succeed. My final solution was using adhesive transparent sheet cover the paper after printing. The transparent sheet stopped paper from soaking up the color ink. Unexpectedly, it also protected paper from peeling off.



To add touch of surprise, I created a cover for the packaging functioning similar to a match preventing a viewer from seeing inside the box until the inner volume has been slid out.







TIP+NOTE

The stories and content that I used in my conceptual packaging of memories developed from my free writings. Professor Laura Chessin advised me to write my memory stories every day, which was very beneficial.

Exhibition

The exhibition of my work was held in Anderson Gallery from the 21st-30th April 2006. Unfortunately, because I spent so long to finding my direction and content, I didn't completely finish the project for my exhibition. I displayed my "Living (with) Things" packaging series, my studies of materials and my related past projects (pop-up, Gay Marriage project, Green project and Presidential Election project).

On the main wall of my space, I displayed "Living (with) Things" by opening each box and hanging it on the wall to emulate a photo frame. I wanted the audience to experience the entire series in at once. I hung my material box studies from the ceiling to the floor, from big to small.

I displayed my past projects on the left wall and right wall next to the main wall, which led the viewers to my main works. Most of my works were 3D objects, so I placed them on separate pedestals in order to let the audience interact each work individually.

Eventhough, I didn't complete all my projects for exhibition, I was happy with the response from the audience. I noticed that the viewers of every age enjoyed and interacted with my works.



Evaluation

The purpose of my creative project was developed from my belief that packaging design could be not only about making beautiful objects, but also a wonderful tool to communicate conceptual and intangible messages. I hoped to invent innovative packaging forms to convey complex ideas uniquely, clearly, playfully and effectively. I also aimed to explore packaging in many different ways in terms of both form and content.

From the start, I experienced a number of problems. I gained many insights by learning from many mistakes. In the early stages, I had to deal with my personal habit of indecision over subject matter. I changed topics often, in response to feeling lost or confused. I now see this confusion is part of the creative process. This experience taught me to be more confident and trust my instincts. After I committed to the subject of memories, I was able to explore with materials and methods, which was the true intent of my project.

After I experimented with many different approaches to creating packages, I realized that every dimension and element of design has the potential to convey messages and meaning both subconsciously and consciously. My “Pong-Pang” project is a good example of the combination of using many different design elements and dimensions such as shape, material, texture, imagery and interactivity to communicate specific memories of my childhood on many levels and with several senses. I also realized that detail is critical to communicating meaning of content effectively. The choice of materials for printing, the choice of imagery style, these little details have a huge effect on how we interact with, and respond to the final object.

On the whole, I learned many methods of using the form of packaging to communicate intangible messages. I learned how to recall and retell my memories in non-verbal ways. I learned how to combine imagery in three dimensions. I learned numerous techniques of paper engineering and paper sculpture to create playful interactive packages. More importantly, I learned to push the boundaries of my way of thinking. This project broadened my creativity and developed my conceptual thinking. In my undergraduate study, I looked at packaging only as a container for an object — a tangible thing. This thesis makes me look at packaging in a different way, which is more imaginative and, I hope, inspiring.

Spending such a magnificent time learning and experimenting packaging design makes me realize how much I love designing three dimensional objects and exploring the interactivity of packaging. In the future, I would like to continue my professional work in this area, and develop creatively from my own experiments and from others who are experimenting in this direction. Hopefully one day I can pass on my skills, thoughts, beliefs and experiences to others as well.



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